

150-7
5858

A S E R M O N

OCCASIONED BY

THE DEATH OF MISS WALDO.

THE HARMONY OF FAITH AND WORKS.

A

S E R M O N



PREACHED IN THE

CENTRAL CHURCH, WORCESTER,

MARCH 23, 1851,

THE SUNDAY AFTER THE DECEASE OF

MISS SARAH WALDO.

BY

S. SWEETSER.

BOSTON:

CHARLES C. LITTLE AND JAMES BROWN.

MDCCCLI.

B O S T O N :
THURSTON, TORRY, AND EMERSON,
Printers, Devonshire Street.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I hasten to convey to you an expression of the consolation and great satisfaction with which the Relatives of the late Miss WALDO listened to the deeply impressive Discourse, preached by you yesterday morning, and especially to the faithful and grateful portraiture given of her character. Surely, the memorial of her *good works* should be held in cherished and honored remembrance by every Christian Philanthropist; and the name of Waldo be inscribed in the annals of the benevolence of the age. As the best means to these ends, as well as for the particular gratification of the family, I have the pleasure of asking, that you would allow us to cause the publication of the Discourse, under your own supervision, and at such early day as may be convenient.

In behalf of my Brother and Sister, and for myself, I am, Dear Sir, with great esteem and respect,

Very gratefully, your obliged servant,

LEVI LINCOLN.

To the REV. SETH SWEETSER.

Monday Morning, March 24, 1851.

HON. LEVI LINCOLN.


DEAR SIR,

Your note, asking in your own name, and that of your brother and sister, that I would allow you to publish the Discourse which I preached on Sunday last, was handed me on Monday. The circumstances constrain me to comply with your request, notwithstanding the obvious reasons which incline me otherwise. The manuscript, which I send with this, is at your disposal.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

S. SWEETSER.

WORCESTER, MARCH 27, 1851.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from
Congregational Library of the American Congregational Association

S E R M O N .

ROMANS, V. 1.

THEREFORE BEING JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD,
THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

JAMES, II. 14, 15, 16, 17.

WHAT DOTH IT PROFIT, MY BRETHREN, THOUGH A MAN SAY HE HATH
FAITH, AND HAVE NOT WORKS? CAN FAITH SAVE HIM? IF A BROTHER OR
SISTER BE NAKED, AND DESTITUTE OF DAILY FOOD, AND ONE OF YOU SAY
UNTO THEM, DEPART IN PEACE, BE YE WARMED AND FILLED; NOTWITH-
STANDING YE GIVE THEM NOT THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE NEEDFUL FOR
THE BODY; WHAT DOTH IT PROFIT? EVEN SO FAITH, IF IT HATH NOT
WORKS, IS DEAD, BEING ALONE.

THE two passages which are here connected, are often looked upon as containing sentiments inconsistent with each other. Paul and James, faith and works, have been exhibited in conflict, as if irreconcilably at variance. In truth, these seeming contradictions present the absolute unity and harmony of the Christian life. There are not two religions proposed to us in the Bible for our acceptance. There are not two ways of doing the will of God and obtaining everlasting life. Our judgment and

our choice are not held suspended between two systems, the one resting upon faith, a spiritual principle, and the other upon works, which are external acts. Faith and works are entirely different things; as much so as the root and branches of a tree. But because different, they are not necessarily in conflict; they are not necessarily disjoined or independent. As the root and the branches make one tree, the root not being in itself a tree, or the branches in themselves a tree, but both conjoined; so faith is not of itself religion, nor works of themselves religion, but faith and works, conjoined and inseparable. You may consider the peculiar offices and relations of the one or the other, just as you may study the different functions and positions of the root, and the branches in the tree; but as the root cannot live without the branches, nor the branches live without the root, so “the just shall live by his faith,” and “faith without works is dead.” There is but one religion, faith and works—the one foundation, the other the superstructure—the one principle, the other performance—the one unseen and spiritual, the other visible and practical. And as in the root and branches there is but one life, and as the same sap circulates throughout the whole; so in religion, there is but one vital principle, and the same love which pervades a true faith, diffuses itself through every Christian work.

Faith is fundamental in the divine life. For there can be no union or affection between the soul and God until we trust in God. We cannot love God without faith; for how can we love a God in whom we cannot trust? And if we do not love God, then we cannot love to do his will. For "without faith," says the apostle, "it is impossible to please him." A life of unbelief is necessarily a life of disobedience. The heart is alienated from the God whom it ought to love, and disregards the will of the God whom it ought to serve. The heart is in an attitude of opposition to God, and what a man does under the motions of such a heart, must incur God's displeasure. The great point in attaining salvation is securing God's favor, and this is offered to faith. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The Scriptures teach us without a question, that, until we exercise this faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, there is no reconciliation between us and God. This is, then, not only fundamental in religion, but also one of the first really holy exercises of the heart in a Christian. Upon it depends the existence of a life in harmony with the will of God. With it comes God's forgiving mercy. With this faith, as the act of the heart which has turned to God, comes that grace which sustains, in a sincere obedience to our Redeemer.

And when we have turned with penitence unto God, and have obtained mercy through our Lord Jesus, the heart finds repose in God; to do his will becomes our delight, and our service is a free and cordial offering unto Him. It is upon this change from a life of unbelief to a life of faith, that the gospel makes our salvation to depend. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit." "Being justified freely by his grace." "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

If faith is thus fundamental in the matter of salvation, so much so that "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified," it is no less fundamental in respect to a subsequent life of holiness. All true devotion and spirituality rests upon it. For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. We go to God with sincerity and earnestness in prayer, in proportion to the clearness and strength of our faith. We have spiritual communion with him according as faith realizes to us the spiritual nature of God. We live as in his sight, in so far as our faith apprehends him ever

present with us. An elevating faith removes the thick darkness from before the throne of God. We know him as he is revealed to us. We approach him boldly through the Mediator. Faith sustains our patience. Faith animates our hope. Faith makes all our intercourse with God a reality. From the nature of things, delight in prayer and spiritual communion with God, a patient waiting upon God for blessings, and devout gratitude and thanksgiving for mercies, are things unknown to an unbeliever. And so also are the enrapturing hopes of heaven, the joyful expectation of meeting God, the longing to be with him, and the anticipations of exalted blessedness in his presence. It is the province of faith to say; "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." I have "a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better."

And while faith sustains, as upon a foundation, the hope of salvation, and all that is devout and spiritual in the experience of the soul, it also sustains a life of righteousness and benevolence. Faith works by love. It is an active principle. It shows itself in its works. A life of righteousness is a life of fidelity to God and to men. And such a life we lead by the urgency and force of right motives. It is faith which vitalizes these motives. It places us in the midst of realities. What God

is and what he requires, are ideas clothed with a living energy. And loving that God whose will is our law, in proportion to the strength and sincerity of our faith, we shall be earnest to please him. The great truths of God which are the principles of righteousness,—the counsels, the threatenings, the promises,—have power over us, as they are received in a believing heart. The words of Christ abide in us according to our faith. And Christ himself represents the whole fruitfulness of the Christian life as depending upon this one thing: “Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine; ye are the branches.” The fruitfulness of a disciple consists in all the acts of cordial obedience in which he honors God, and in all the works of love in which he imitates Christ. A cold and formal compliance with duty, if it be religion at all, is at best the unattractive naked skeleton, having, it may be, the joints and members of a true body, but lacking the animating spirit. The winning and impressive features in Christ’s character, are the tenderness of his compassion, the warmth of his love, and his ready self-denial for others. If, now, a true faith brings us into sympathy with Christ, we shall imbibe the ardent and generous affections which inspired him. We shall have in some measure

the same kind of benevolence which Christ had. We shall deny ourselves, shall sympathize with the suffering, we shall care for the needy, shall be interested for the ignorant and the benighted, and our compassions will glow, as did those of our Saviour, for the souls of perishing men. Our faith will work by love, and we shall abound in deeds of love, just in proportion to the measure and closeness of our union with Christ. These works are just as much the fruit and the evidence of a true faith, as the leaves and the clusters are the evidence and the fruit of vitality in the vine. They grow up out of faith, as the vine grows up out of its root, and are necessary to the completeness of faith in its designed development and operation. No such fruit will grow from any other root. For, as there can be no true benevolence without love to God, so there can be no true benevolence without faith; the two graces being conjoined and co-existent in the human heart. If there is a true love in the heart,—love to God and love to man,—the life will show the works of love. There will be earnest, direct and persevering endeavors to do good. The principle of a reigning selfishness will be disowned and repudiated, and the highest welfare of men will be sought with sincere and earnest desire, and in the use of those means which God has given us wherewith we may accomplish these ends. Time,

talents, property, the labor of our hands, the energy of our minds, the warmest and best impulses of our hearts, will be devoted to the cause of Christ and humanity. Obeying God in the required duties of the Christian life, is the honor which faith prompts us to bring to God as our Father and Sovereign. Obeying God in the works of benevolence, is the honor which faith prompts us to pay to him in imitation of himself, as he is presented to us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

If this imperfect view be substantially a correct view, we can easily see that there is really no conflict between faith and works. Faith is the sole and only ground of our justification before God; whilst yet a justifying faith is not a dead faith, but an active principle working by love, purifying the heart, bringing forth the fruits of righteousness and true holiness. Whoever has this faith, will love God, and be conformed to the image of his Son. Whoever has a justifying faith, will be careful to abound in good works; knowing that "Faith without works is dead, being alone." He will look with humble gratitude to Christ as his Saviour, and say, "By the grace of God I am what I am;" and as he sees the condescension, self-denial and sufferings of Christ, the true workings of his love and compassion, he will feel that he himself can only be Christlike, and glorify his Redeemer by an earnest

imitation of him in the work of doing good. In his faith he reads his acceptance of God through Christ; and from his faith he finds motives to holiness and benevolence quickened into activity in his soul. As his Christian life begins in his faith, so it is developed into symmetry by the works which are the fruit of faith. While he cannot say, 'My works save me;' neither can he say, 'My faith saves me;' if so be that his faith hath produced no works. If he 'seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?' A true faith cannot say to 'a brother or sister, naked and destitute of daily food, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, and give them not those things which are needful for the body.'

Hence it is that a life of the truest Christian benevolence, is the life of the truest faith. Such benevolence is more expansive, it is more universal, it embraces the temporal and eternal welfare of men; and in its exercise it constantly seeks to glorify God, and to render a tribute of gratitude to that Saviour who, "though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."

And hence also the most symmetrical and completely developed piety is that which subsists in the clearest faith, and exhibits itself most conspic-

uously in works of righteousness and benevolence. All true piety is not equally developed. All true faith is not equally vigorous. With a feeble faith, the whole Christian life may be marred by weakness and inconsistencies. In some minds, an undue preponderance is given to faith as a speculative principle, and the fruits of faith are by consequence small. In other minds, an undue preponderance is given to works; and while there may be faith, yet its feebleness is so overlaid by other principles, that works, apparently benevolent, are greatly tinctured with selfishness. And there is danger too, as the apostle intimates, that men will expect, on the one hand, salvation by a faith which is wholly dead, producing no works of righteousness or love; and on the other, that they will trust to works for salvation without faith, forgetting that "if righteousness come by the law, then is Christ dead in vain."

The religion of the gospel, while it embraces faith and works, cannot subsist on either alone. Faith must be the root, or there will be no fruit. There must be fruit, or there is no evidence of the root. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." But when a true faith has brought us in humble submission and cordial love to Christ, and we are accepted in him, we grow into his likeness, are conformed to righteousness and true holiness, and our lives are adorned

with the fruit of good works to the glory of God. This is the only full and symmetrical development of the religion of Jesus Christ.

In reflecting upon the recent death of a valued member of this church, it seemed to me that I could not more appropriately improve the occasion than by presenting, as I have briefly done in this discourse, that aspect of the gospel which was more peculiarly illustrated in her life. Some public notice of this event seemed to be demanded by the unusual character of the circumstances involved.

A family which, for more than half a century, has been held in high consideration in this community, representing the manners, habits and feelings of another generation, has entirely passed away from amongst us. The very name with us is extinct; not one remaining to transmit it to coming days. Not one survives of those who so punctually occupied their seats in this house. Within the short space of eleven years,* the brother, the three sisters, with one who for a long period had been a member of the family, have gone down to the grave. Endowed with affluence, intelligence and piety, they held a position necessarily influential. And having

* Miss Rebecca Waldo died in June, 1810; Hon. Daniel Waldo, July 9, 1845; Miss Elizabeth Waldo, Aug. 28, 1845; Miss Sally Flagg, July 2, 1849.

of God hearts to use their influence and wealth in promoting the welfare and the happiness of others, they have been eminently distinguished among public and private benefactors. The streams of their bounty have found channels by which to refresh the suffering around us, and to carry far abroad, amongst the degraded and the ignorant of the human family, the blessings of knowledge and religion.

With this religious society they have been identified from its origin. Their liberal gifts sustained the heavy expense by which, in its weak beginnings, the parish was established; and their generosity has aided in every effort to promote its welfare. A continual flow of charity from them has passed through the treasury of this church, and into the funds of all the prominent religious and benevolent societies of the land. And there is of necessity a feeling of sadness coming over us, in viewing this great change. It is no common or trivial event in a community, that such a fountain of benevolence is closed, and that such beneficent influences are arrested. But we should not indulge in too much sadness. There is a treasury of pleasant recollections and a fund of quickening motive in the past, to which it is wiser to look. It is a privilege and a satisfaction, to think, as we may, of the sufferings which by their beneficence have been alleviated, of the gladness imparted to so many cheerless households, of the comforts

dispensed to so many feeble and sick, of the encouragement given to so many ministers of Christ, of the Bibles distributed, the books printed and circulated, and of the missionaries who have been sustained in our own and foreign lands,—the various and wide spread fruits of their wise and active goodness.

There is an unusual gratification in having these associations with affluence. It elevates our view of the true uses of wealth, and seems to cast, for the moment, a hallowed influence over worldly acquisitions. There is apt to be so much that is sordid in the acquirement and disposition of riches, that we are, in the contrast, led to contemplate a free and intelligent liberality with a peculiar delight. It is a salutary exercise for us to cherish these reflections upon the past; and while we are impressed with the providence of God which has removed from us these long tried friends, we should be devoutly thankful for what God put it into their hearts to do while yet they were amongst us, and should feel the new obligations which rest upon us to engage with all fidelity and zeal in promoting the same glorious ends.

The last survivor has passed away, in a good old age, continuing till the close in the full enjoyment of the active powers of her mind and the strong affections of her heart. I have said that I have

presented the harmony of faith and works, in this discourse, because it seemed to me to be the aspect of religion more especially illustrated in her life. We should be careful in this matter, not to speak in terms of too positive knowledge. Our judgments of each other are based upon those imperfect views in which we appear outwardly; God only sees the heart. And thus speaking, it is safe to say, that her piety was the ornament of her character. It was founded in faith, it was visible in works. From a child she had known the Scriptures, and had walked in public communion with the church, for almost threescore years and ten. Her piety appeared to be serious, thoughtful and intelligent. Resting upon Christ as her Saviour, she had hope in him of her acceptance with God. Exemplary in devotion, she consecrated the earliest hour of the morning to secret communion with her Heavenly Father. Exercising a marked feeling of dependence upon God, she was calm under the trials she was called to pass through, exhibiting a cheerful submission to the will of God, and gratefully enjoying his goodness. The even flow and tranquillity of her life, seldom depressed, seldom elevated, seemed to be the influence of a faith which always realized to her the superintendence and the providence of God. Her religion partook of the activity of her natural disposition. With an industry in her daily affairs

altogether untiring, she was also diligent in acquiring religious knowledge, and in understanding the means of usefulness. Her benevolence was in almost constant exercise. The numerous objects immediately around us, claimed and received her patient attention. Public charities and private solicitations from abroad, were continually presented to her. And as it was her rule to distribute rather than to accumulate, the generosity with which she met these demands are matters of common fame. The hearts that she has privately and with tender consideration cheered and sustained by her bounties, are among the secret things which will come to light when it shall be said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Her benevolence was, I think, particularly a religious benevolence. She had her hope of salvation in Jesus Christ, and her faith, in this more than in any other way, showed its true operation. She was not active in personal efforts. She did not go forth in public endeavors, or in those peculiarly self-denying and pains-taking enterprises by which some illustrate their love for Christ. But with a conscientious regard to her stewardship, and a strong interest in the various objects towards which her benevolence flowed, unobtrusive and unostentatious withal, she gave upon principle and with a warm affection. Her estimate of duty was comprehensive, embracing not

merely the temporal, but the spiritual necessities of men; not limited to our own community or country, but extending wherever the channels are open for dispensing blessings to mankind. And although, through an unusually long life, the same course had been pursued; yet, I think I may safely say, that age did not chill her zeal in doing good, or long habit produce indifference. But with unwonted steadfastness she continued to think of others rather than of herself, and to seek by all means their happiness: and, as it may readily be supposed, she looked forward calmly to the close of life, and enjoyed in the evening of her day, as in its brightest hours, the calm hope and elevating peace of the gospel.

And is it not reasonable, that the remembrance of such an illustration of the gospel should be profitable to us? It is, I know, only an illustration, a partial one, an imperfect one. Her faith developed itself very strongly in one direction; and in this respect, is not the view calculated to impress and excite to higher efforts and more untiring duties? Are not we who survive, called upon to gird ourselves with more alacrity to the work, and to fill up that which is lacking in our Redeemer's service? Ought we not to be excited to a higher liberality, to more devotion, to more watchfulness, to a more vigorous faith, and to more unceasing endeavors to advance the kingdom of Christ?

Of all the forms in which we can be permitted to pass through life, no one is so desirable as that of being a benefactor to our race. Of all the uses of our intellect, none are of so eminent worth as those in which our minds are devoted to God's glory, and the welfare of men. If wealth can at all be a blessing, if influence is ever to be coveted, surely wealth and influence used to elevate, enlighten and sanctify mankind, to extend the gospel of the grace of God, are most especially so. And if there be, in view of life and of death, one thing more than any other worth our seeking, it is that faith which secures salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord, and which exhibits itself in works of love to men, to the glory of God the Father.

